

TESTIMONY OF SARA SENFT BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS SUB COMMITTEE
Department of Rehabilitative Services Budget (DORS)
LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING, FEBRUARY 27, 2015

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen of the Appropriations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak and express my concerns. My name is Sara Senft, and I am speaking on behalf of Independence Unlimited, the independent living center for the greater Hartford area. As a person with several disabling conditions, and a consumer of the agency I just mentioned, the proposal to eliminate funding for these centers greatly concerns and directly affects me. Therefore, I am against eliminating funding for them.

For nearly two years now, I have been working with my current advocate. Over the time we have worked together, we have built up a good, strong relationship and she has been very helpful and supportive in my efforts to increase my independence and living a more complete, satisfying life. Case in point: I used to hold a part time job with an employer who treated me very poorly and the job conditions made for a very bad match---only made worse by how my combination of disabilities impacts my performance at work. Although I did not disclose any of my diagnoses, I would not be surprised if she suspected something. The employer also was quite brutal verbally and refused to accommodate my needs---even after I explained how they would benefit me. That situation left me very confused, miserable, and desperate for a way out. My advocate worked with me to explore the situation, better understand what was happening and why it was wrong, and ultimately come up with a way to leave the job gracefully. If it weren't for her assistance, I would probably still be trapped in that abusive situation and my quality of life would be quite worse.

That is not the only way my advocate has helped. In addition to the situation I just described, she has helped me in plenty of other ways. Thanks to her encouragement and some involvement in making it happen, I have more up-to-date diagnostic information. This updated information has helped me better understand my strengths and difficulties, making it easier to advocate for myself so that I get the supports I need for maximum independence.

Just as I am not the only one who has benefited from the services provided by these centers, I would not be the only one hurt by a loss of funding. Several people have already spoken about how it would hurt them, and they are just a few of hundreds, if not thousands. Losing the help of independent living centers would force individuals and families to consider other options. These can include expensive private programs, which often have long waiting lists. Doing so would strain personal and family budgets, which in turn hurts the state's economy because they are less able to spend money on basic necessities and other consumer goods.

In closing, I urge you to reconsider your plan to cut funding for the Independent Living Centers and to search for alternate ways to manage the budget. We all want to live full, satisfying lives with a high degree of self-sufficiency. Some of us need extra help to make that happen. Thank you for your time.